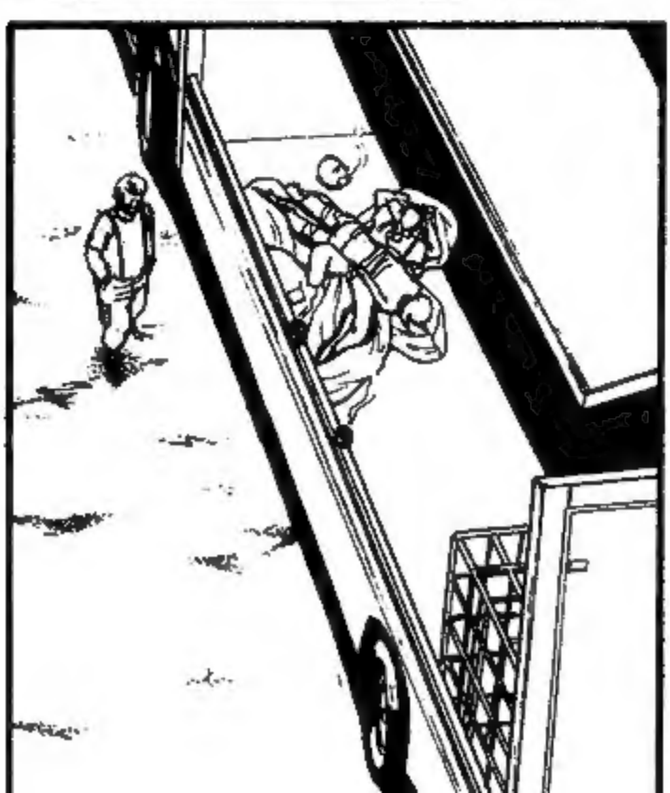
INTERVAL:

"LITTLE PARTY WITH PUPPETS"

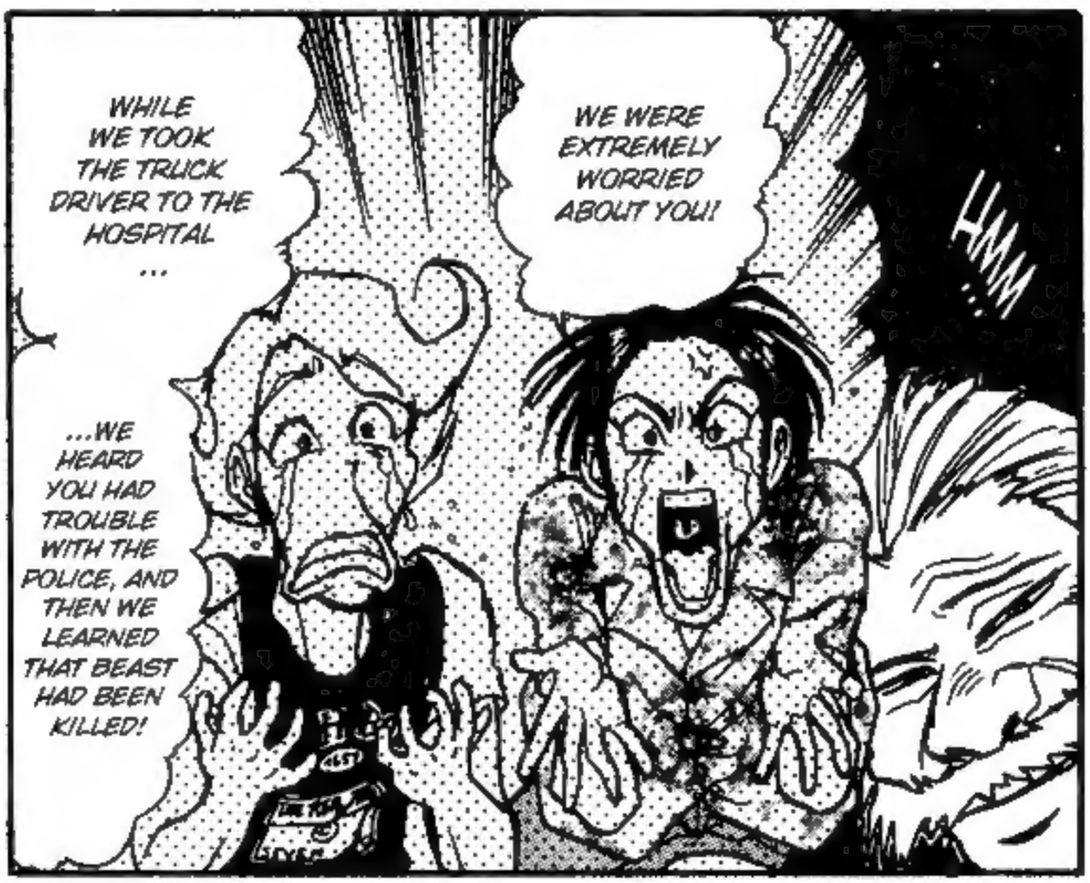
SCHHH

MISS LISELOTTE! OVER HERE PLEASE!
YES... BUT THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED ME WERE...

IS IT TRUE THAT THE POLICE DIDN'T WANT YOU TO INTERVENE AND EVEN TRIED TO DETAIN YOU?
HUH ... YES ...
SO IT'S TRUE? YOU CAME, WITH YOUR LION, TO KILL *BEAST*, RIGHT?

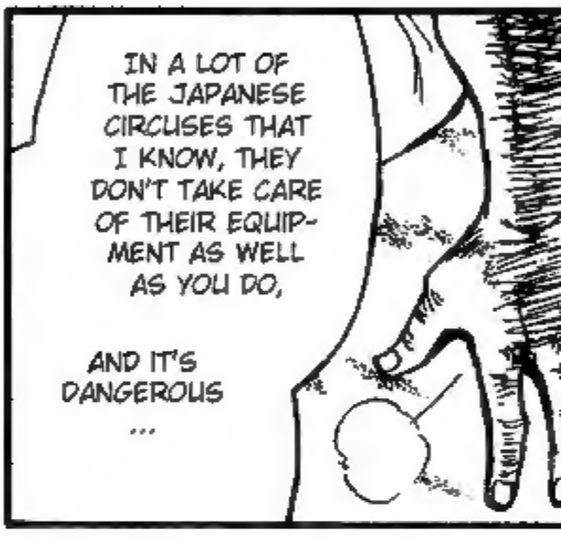


HE HE ! RED PAINT ...
RRR
HA HA !! PLENTY OF SCREWS EVERY-WHERE ...
ZZZ


WHILE WE TOOK THE TRUCK DRIVER TO THE HOSPITAL ...
...WE HEARD YOU HAD TROUBLE WITH THE POLICE, AND THEN WE LEARNED THAT BEAST HAD BEEN KILLED!
WE WERE EXTREMELY WORRIED ABOUT YOU!
HMM...

YES ... BOSS.
IF WE DON'T TAKE GOOD CARE OF OUR EQUIPMENT, ONE DAY IT'LL BETRAY US.
YOU'RE REPAIRING YOUR PUPPET, SHIROGANE? THAT'S SOME HARD WORK ...

POF


IN A LOT OF THE JAPANESE CIRCUSES THAT I KNOW, THEY DON'T TAKE CARE OF THEIR EQUIPMENT AS WELL AS YOU DO,
AND IT'S DANGEROUS ...

YOU CALLED ME "BOSS"?
YES ...
YOU THINK I'M ONE?

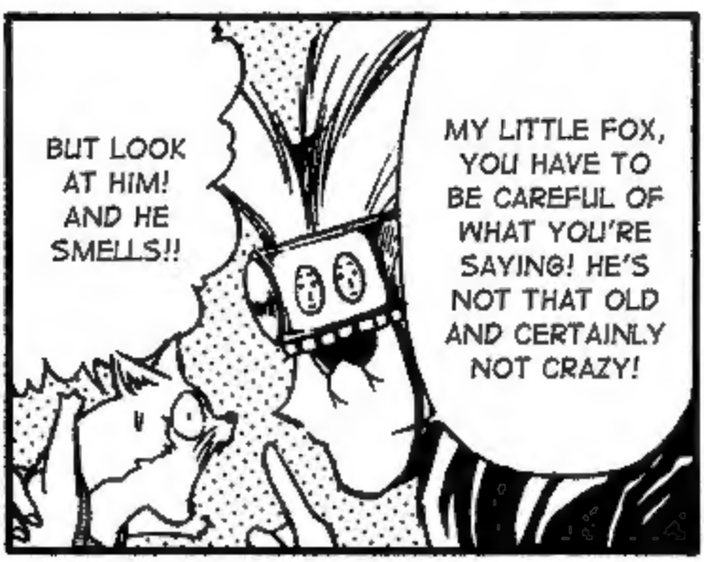
ME!?
CER-TAINLY NOT!!
YOU SEEM DISCOURAGED, MISTER NAKAMACHI ...

THE BRAT HAS ALREADY FALLEN ASLEEP?
YES. I THINK MASTER WAS VERY TIRED...
SCRATCH
SCRATCH
... "DISCOURAGED" ...
I'VE BEEN IN THE CIRCUS FOR FORTY YEARS! AND FOR A WHILE, I EVEN DIRECTED ONE... SO, AFTER HAVING DONE ALL THAT, I CAN'T BE...
YES... MASTER IS VERY STRONG... INSIDE
HE HAS THE AUDACITY OF TRUE ARTISTS!
I ADMIT THAT I WAS SURPRISED... I THOUGHT OF HIM AS THE SON OF A GOOD FAMILY, A LITTLE WEAK AND AFFECTED. BUT...
WELL, IT'S NORMAL ... PEOPLE SAY THAT HE FACED THAT HUGE MAN-EATING TIGER BARE-HANDED!
...
...
HA HA HA ! ... SHE ALREADY HAS A CONTRACT WITH ONE OF THE BIGGEST INTERNATIONAL CIRCUSES!
SHE TOLD ME THAT SHE WANTED TO BECOME A MEMBER OF YOUR CIRCUS ...
I THINK IT'S NORMAL... SHE SUCCEEDED IN KILLING *BEAST* WHEN THE POLICE WERE TOTALLY OVERTAKEN BY THE CIRCUMSTANCES...
MISS LISELOTTE SUDDENLY BECAME FAMOUS!
THE PRESS AND THE MEDIA TALK OF NOTHING BUT HER!

WHY ...
WOULD SHE WANT TO JOIN A SMALL CIRCUS,
THAT HAS AN UNCER-TAIN FUTURE?
AH! THE KIND OF CHEAP GIFT THAT YOU BUY IN FAIRS ...
A SMALL STUFFED ANIMAL THAT SOMEONE THREW ON THE BEACH.
... WHAT'S THAT?
POF
POF
... HUH?! WHAT?!
... "CHEAP"? ME? WATCH YOUR TONGUE! I'M A SILVER FOX OF THE NOBLEST ANCESTRY!
HOP!

FWAAH... WHAT'S UP, MY LITTLE FOX?
THE OLD FOOL HERE SAID THAT I'M A "CHEAP" TOY!

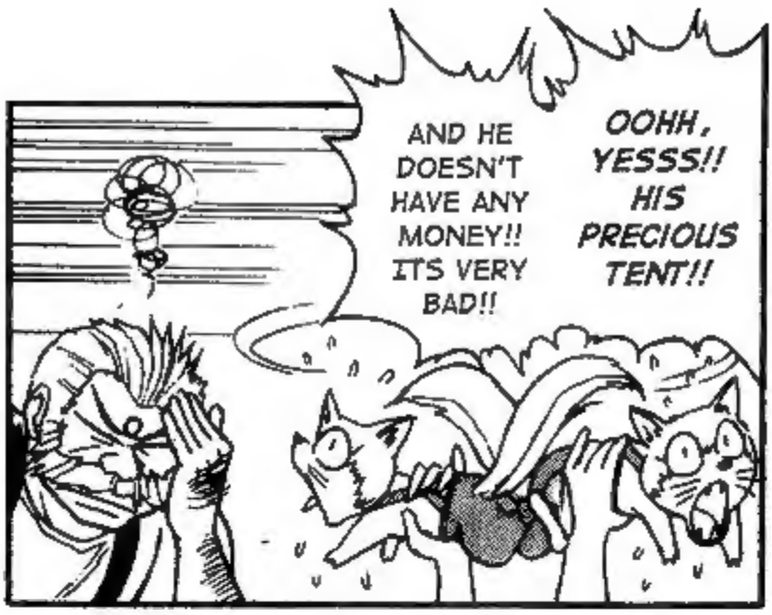
BUT, SHIROGANE ... WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
ARLEQUIN! EH, ARLEQUIN!

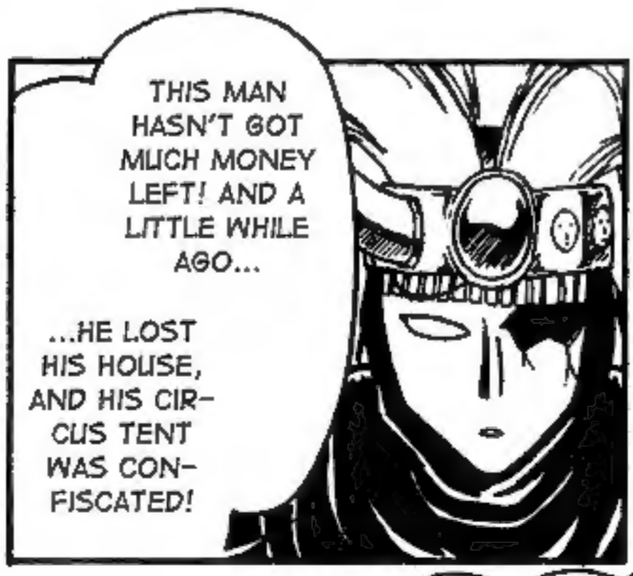

BUT LOOK AT HIM! AND HE SMELLS!!
MY LITTLE FOX, YOU HAVE TO BE CAREFUL OF WHAT YOU'RE SAYING! HE'S NOT THAT OLD AND CERTAINLY NOT CRAZY!

NO!
WHY'S IT, "OLD FOOL" !? ... WAIT A SECOND, SHIROGANE !

DON'T YOU THINK HE'S DISCOURAGED ARLEQUIN?
OH... WAIT A MOMENT SHIROGANE... YOU GOT ME GOOD WITH YOUR PUPPETS ...
IT WOULD BE NORMAL, MY LITTLE FOX!

DIRTY LITTLE VERMIN! HOW DARE YOU SAY THAT I LOOK DIS-COURAGED!?
HE LOOKS LIKE AN OLD GRANDPA, OVERTAKEN BY THE EVENTS! HE'S COMPLETELY DISCOURAGED AND HE'S AFRAID OF SOMETHING...

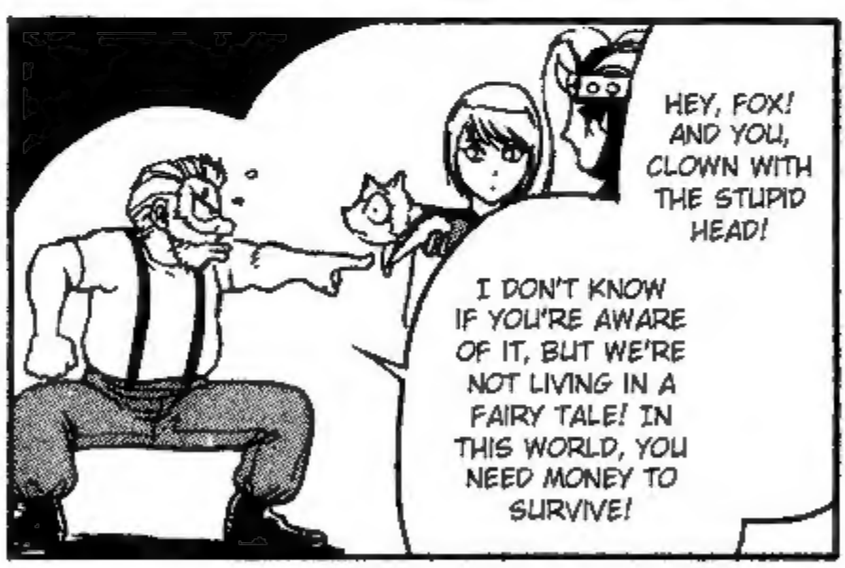

AND HE DOESN'T HAVE ANY MONEY!! ITS VERY BAD!!
OOHH, YESSS!! HIS PRECIOUS TENT!!


THIS MAN HASN'T GOT MUCH MONEY LEFT! AND A LITTLE WHILE AGO...
...HE LOST HIS HOUSE, AND HIS CIR-CUS TENT WAS CON-FISCATED!

ALRIGHT! I UNDERSTAND! I WILL PLAY WITH YOUR PUPPETS!

WHAT?!?
... BAD?
MY LITTLE FOX... WHY IS IT,

I'VE BEEN IN THE CIRCUS SINCE I WAS 9! GOT IT!?
ALRIGHT! I'M SHINOBU NAKAMACHI, AND I'LL BE 53 THIS YEAR!!


HEY, FOX! AND YOU, CLOWN WITH THE STUPID HEAD!
I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE AWARE OF IT, BUT WE'RE NOT LIVING IN A FAIRY TALE! IN THIS WORLD, YOU NEED MONEY TO SURVIVE!

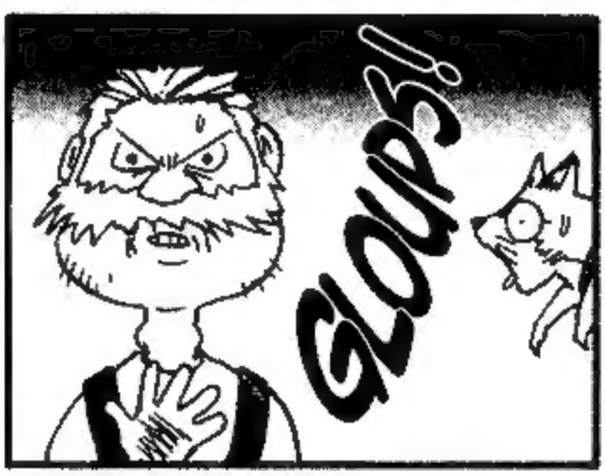
WHO'S "ME" ?

AND ME, I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TO SUPPORT HIRO, NORI, MASARU AND SHIRO-GANE!

GRRAC GROC

HOW COME I'M LYING!?
LOOK!!
BE CAREFUL ARLEQUIN! I'M SURE IT'S NOTHING BUT A STORY! IT'S NOT TRUE! HE LIES!

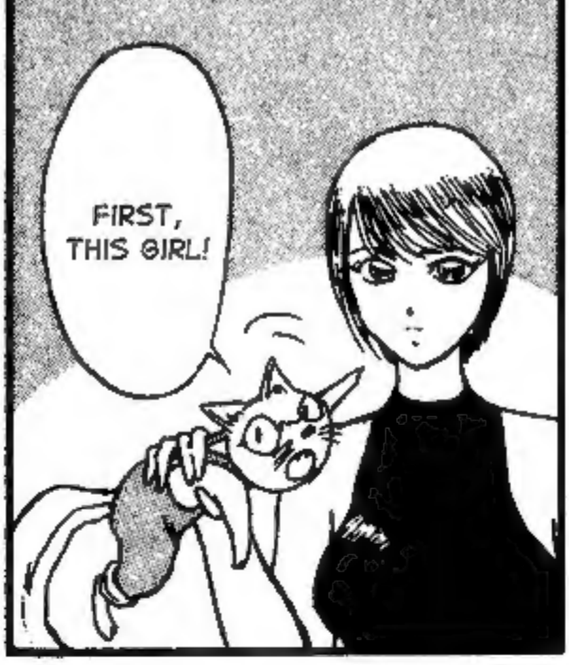
OH MY! WHAT A SUR- PRISE!


GLOUPS!

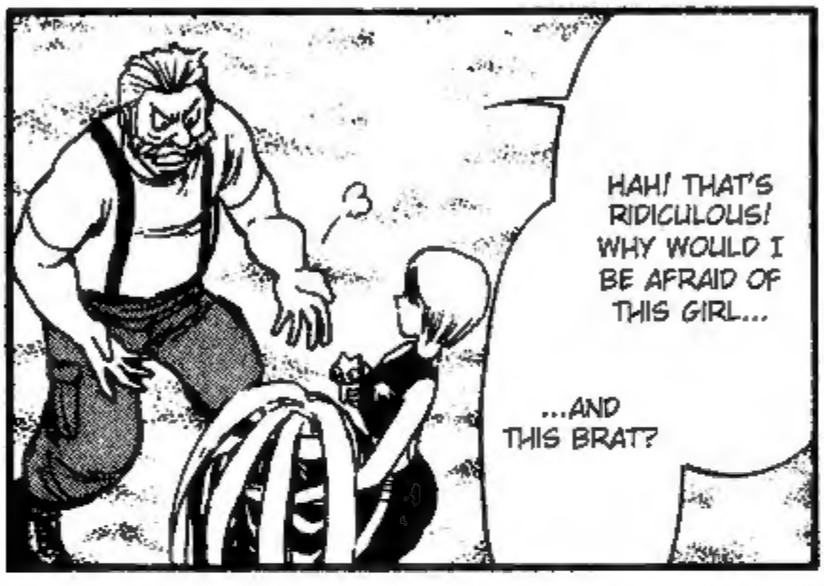
REALLY AMAZING!!

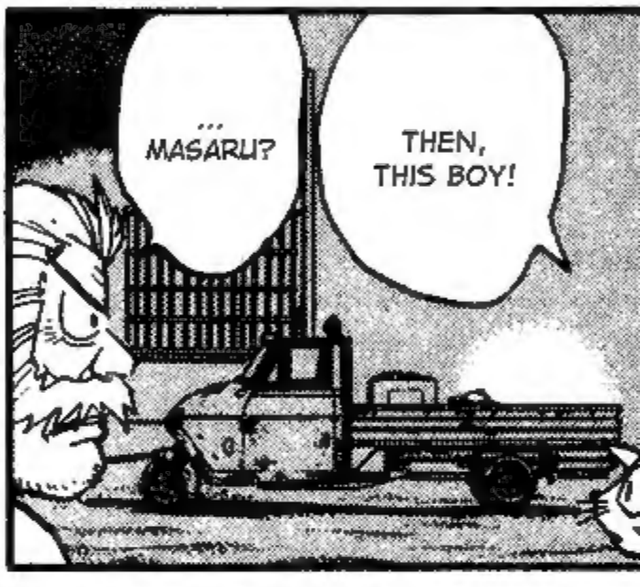
HUH ...
YOU THINK?

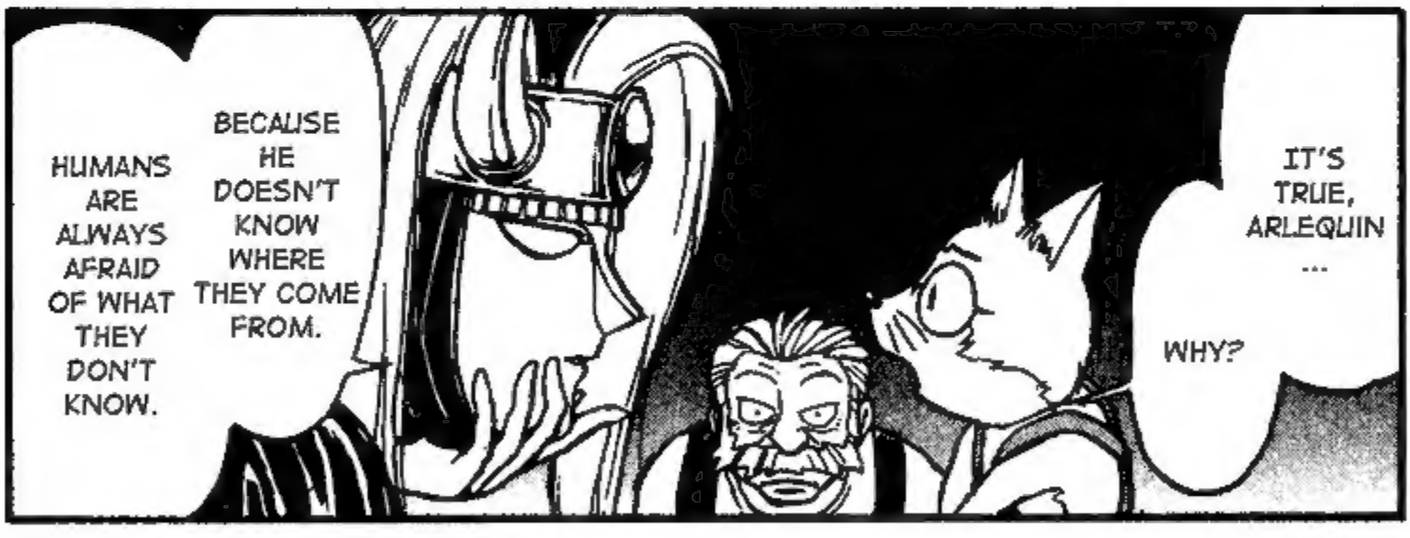
I CAN EASILY DIGEST TWO OR THREE A DAY! AND I CAN ALSO DO LOTS OF OTHER THINGS!
HE'S A STONE EATER! ONE OF THE DESCENDANTS OF THE GREAT STONE EATERS WHO LIVED IN LONDON IN 1780!!
SHE'S WELL INFORMED!

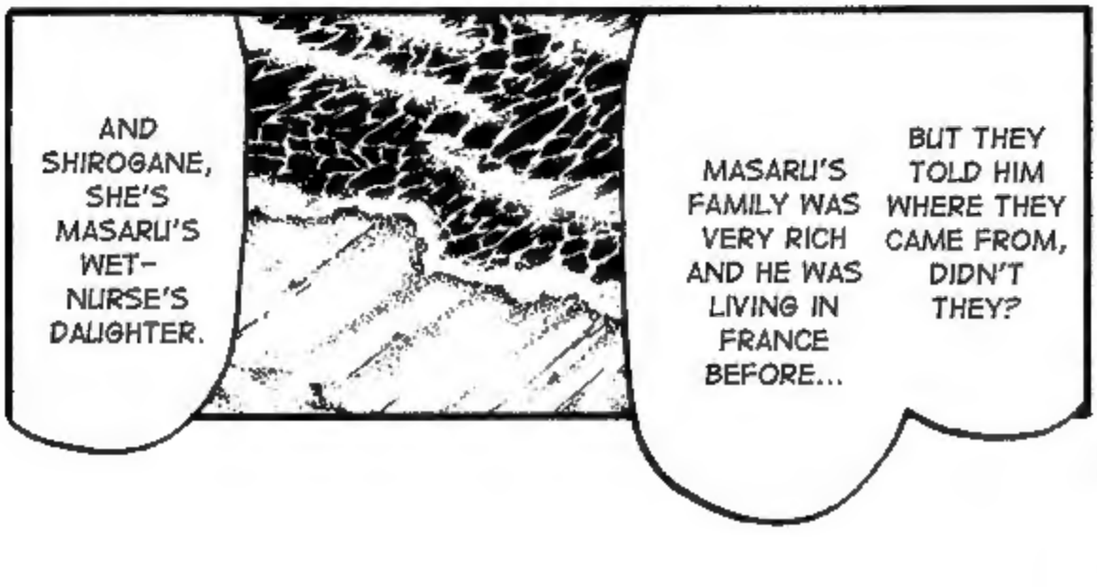

FIRST, THIS GIRL!

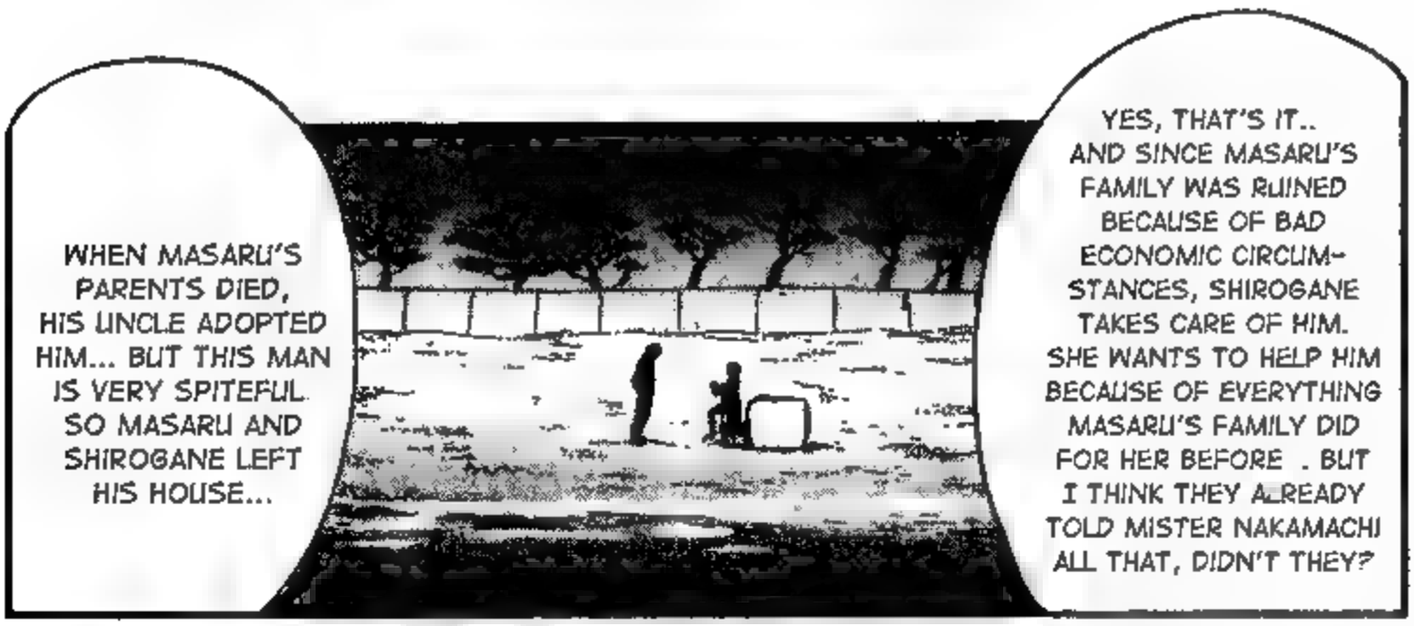
YEAH! TELL ME WHO I'M AFRAID OF!
HOW AMAZING! BUT THEN... WHO OR WHAT IS HE AFRAID OF?

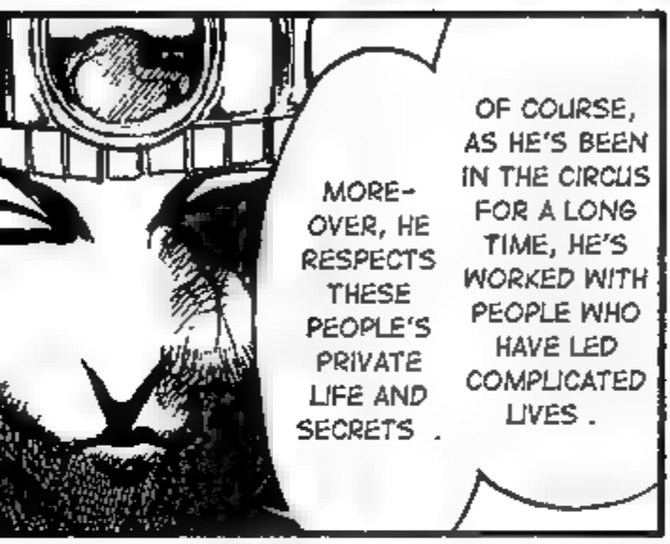

HAH! THAT'S RIDICULOUS! WHY WOULD I BE AFRAID OF THIS GIRL...
...AND THIS BRAT?


... MASARU?
THEN, THIS BOY!


HUMANS ARE ALWAYS AFRAID OF WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW.
BECAUSE HE DOESN'T KNOW WHERE THEY COME FROM.
IT'S TRUE, ARLEQUIN ...
WHY?

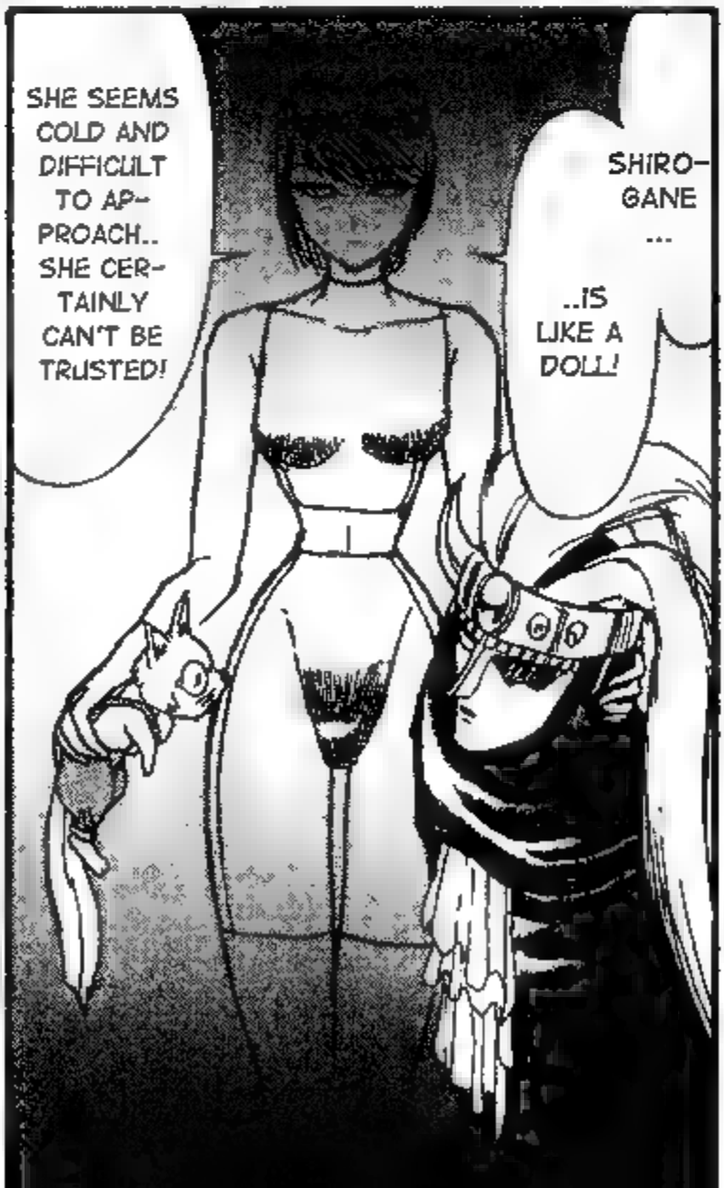

AND SHIROGANE, SHE'S MASARU'S WET-NURSE'S DAUGHTER.
MASARU'S FAMILY WAS VERY RICH AND HE WAS LIVING IN FRANCE BEFORE...
BUT THEY TOLD HIM WHERE THEY CAME FROM, DIDN'T THEY?


WHEN MASARU'S PARENTS DIED, HIS UNCLE ADOPTED HIM... BUT THIS MAN IS VERY SPITEFUL. SO MASARU AND SHIROGANE LEFT HIS HOUSE...
YES, THAT'S IT.. AND SINCE MASARU'S FAMILY WAS RUINED BECAUSE OF BAD ECONOMIC CIRCUM-STANCES, SHIROGANE TAKES CARE OF HIM. SHE WANTS TO HELP HIM BECAUSE OF EVERYTHING MASARU'S FAMILY DID FOR HER BEFORE . BUT I THINK THEY ALREADY TOLD MISTER NAKAMACHI ALL THAT, DIDN'T THEY?


MORE-OVER, HE RESPECTS THESE PEOPLE'S PRIVATE LIFE AND SECRETS .
OF COURSE, AS HE'S BEEN IN THE CIRCUS FOR A LONG TIME, HE'S WORKED WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE LED COMPLICATED LIVES .

BUT ... I ...
...THOSE STORIES
I THINK MISTER NAKAMACHI STILL HAS SOME DOUBTS ABOUT...

HEY, ONE MOMENT! I DON'T EVEN THINK THAT!
HE'S NEVER SEEN AN ARTIST LIKE HER!

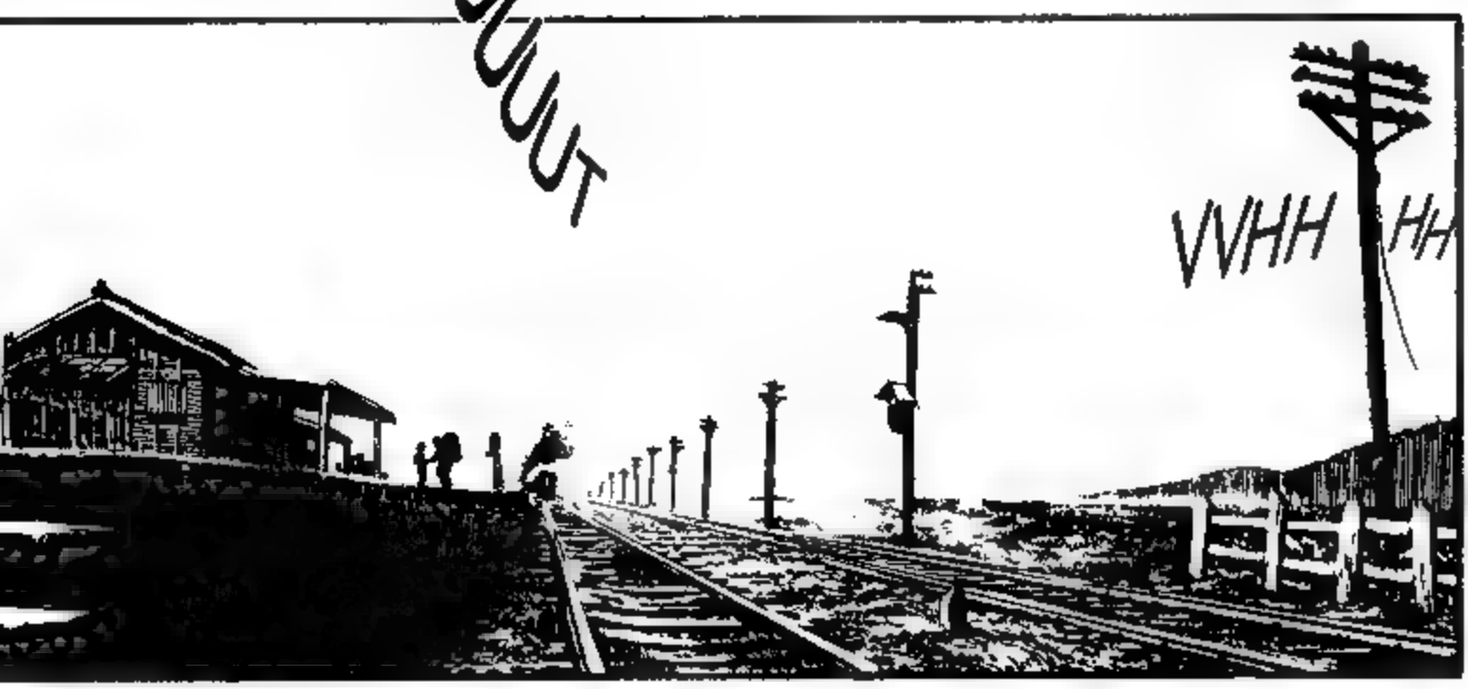

SHE SEEMS COLD AND DIFFICULT TO AP-PROACH.. SHE CER-TAINLY CAN'T BE TRUSTED!
SHIRO-GANE ...
..IS LIKE A DOLL!

BUT WHEN HE MET MASARU AND SHIROGANE, THEY REALLY HAD TOO MANY PROBLEMS! PROBLEMS THAT WERE BEYOND UNDERSTANDING!
AND MORE THAN THAT..

WELL, OK! IT'S TRUE! I MAY HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT THAT A LITTLE!!
IT'S TRUE THAT I'M SOME-WHAT STRANGE
DID YOU SEE THE WEIRD PUPPET SHE MANIPU-LATES!!
YOU'RE LIKE MY FAMILY!
SO I'VE DECIDED TO TRUST YOU COM-PLETELY!
BUT NOW, YOU'RE MEMBERS OF THE NAKAMACHI CIRCUS!!
AND ME, I'M AT HIS SERVICE, AND I'M ENTIRELY DEVOTED TO HIM!
...MASTER MASARU WILL NEVER BETRAY YOU!
IF THOSE WORDS ARE TRUE ...

...I KNOW THAT ONE DAY ...
DON'T WORRY, MISTER NAKAMACHI ...

HAPPINESS WILL KNOCK ON YOUR DOOR.

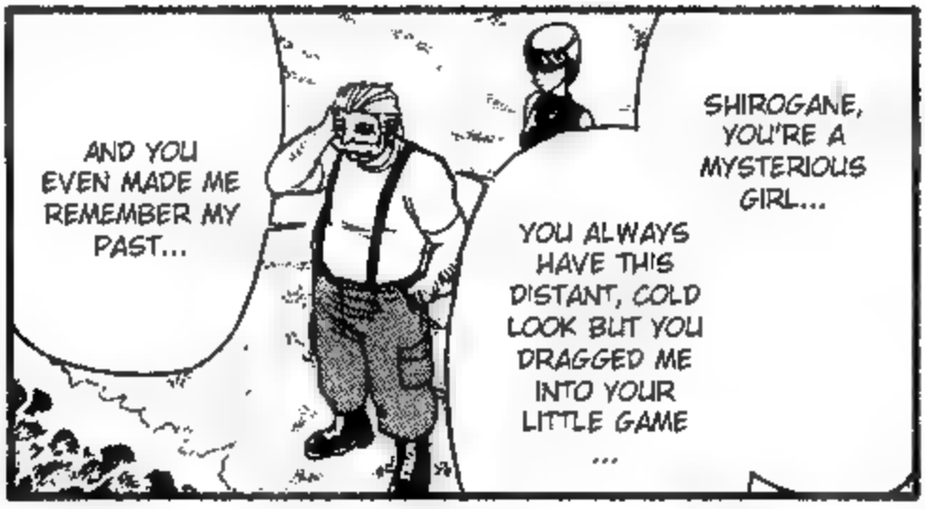

TUUUUT
VVHH HH

YES.

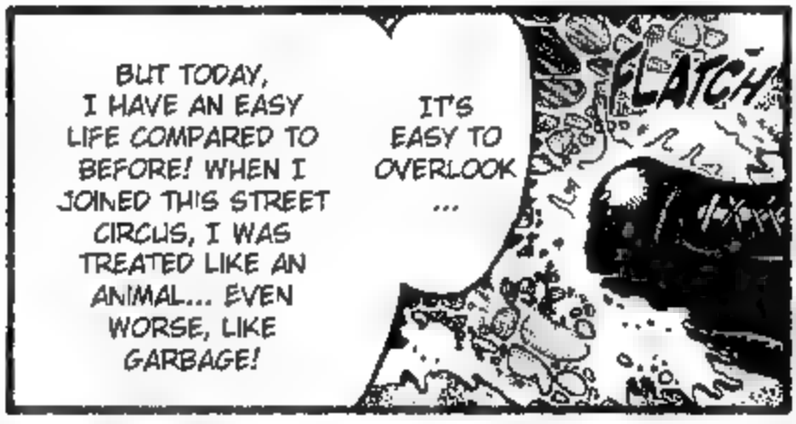
IT'S UNDER THAT CONDITION THAT HE'LL GIVE YOU FOOD ... IS THAT UNDERSTOOD?
SHINOBU, WHEN YOU'RE IN THIS LITTLE STREET CIRCUS, YOU'LL HAVE TO LISTEN CAREFULLY TO THE CHIEF AND DO EVERYTHING HE TELLS YOU TO...

...BE SURE THAT ONE DAY, HAPPINESS WILL COME TO YOU.
IF YOU'RE ABLE TO PERSEVERE ...

"BY PERSEVERING, HAPPINESS WILL COME" ...


AND YOU EVEN MADE ME REMEMBER MY PAST...
YOU ALWAYS HAVE THIS DISTANT, COLD LOOK BUT YOU DRAGGED ME INTO YOUR LITTLE GAME ...
SHIROGANE, YOU'RE A MYSTERIOUS GIRL...

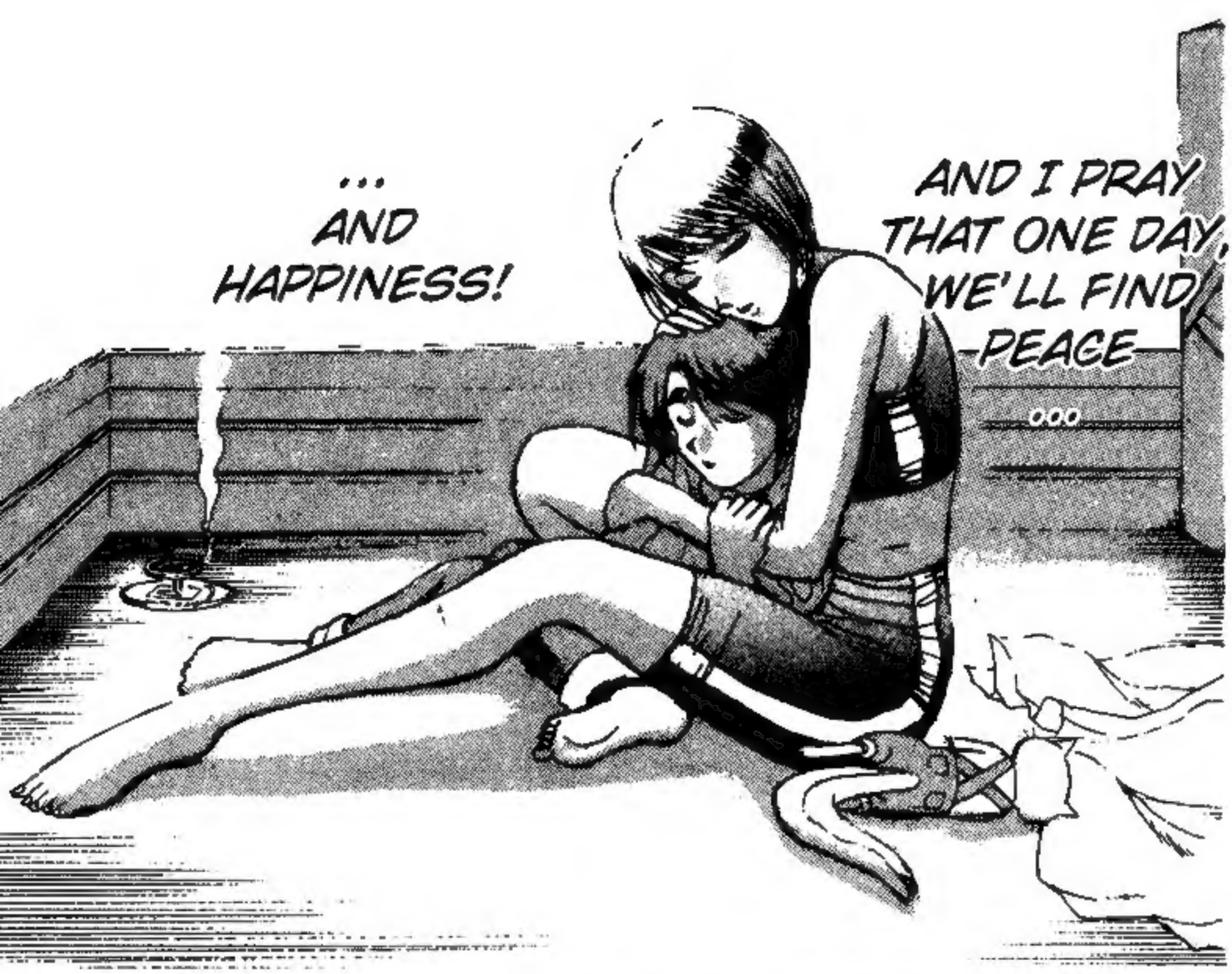
...AND IT WAS ALWAYS VERY COLD.
EVERY NIGHT, WE CRIED OURSELVES TO SLEEP...
THERE WERE OTHER BRATS WITH ME... WE HAD TO EAT THE FOOD THAT THE SPECTATORS LEFT UNDER THEIR SEATS...

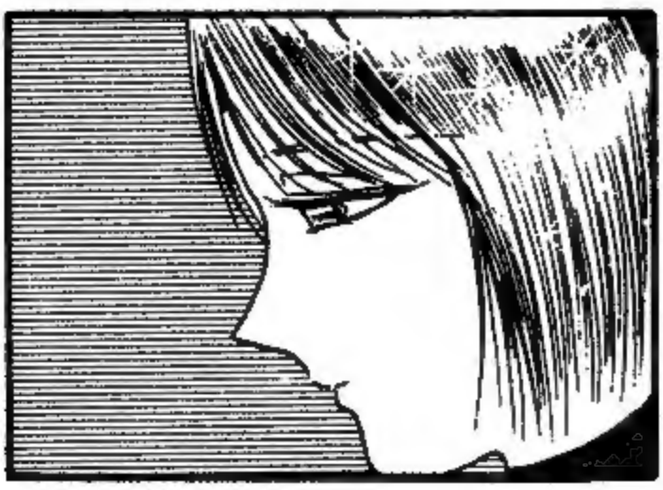

BUT TODAY, I HAVE AN EASY LIFE COMPARED TO BEFORE! WHEN I JOINED THIS STREET CIRCUS, I WAS TREATED LIKE AN ANIMAL... EVEN WORSE, LIKE GARBAGE!
IT'S EASY TO OVERLOOK ...
FLATCH

YOU CAN'T DO THOSE ACROBATIC TRICKS?
IF YOU DON'T WANT THESE NEEDLES IN YOUR BUTT, YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO SUCCEED NEXT TIME!!

I CAN SAY THAT I NEVER KNEW THIS FAMOUS "HAPPINESS" MY MOTHER TALKED ABOUT.
...BUT MY CIRCUS WENT BANKRUPT ALMOST INSTANTLY.
A LONG TIME AFTER, I FINALLY SUCCEEDED IN REALIZING ONE OF MY DREAMS...
BUT ... DESPITE ...
I'VE ENDED UP CONVINCED THAT HAPPINESS WILL NEVER COME TO ME!
EVEN TODAY, I DON'T HAVE MONEY OR A BIG TROUPE ...
...AND I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE TO GO!
HNN!
AAAH ... NN ...
DID HE HAVE A NIGHTMARE?
MASTER!
TAN
AAAHHH!!
WOW

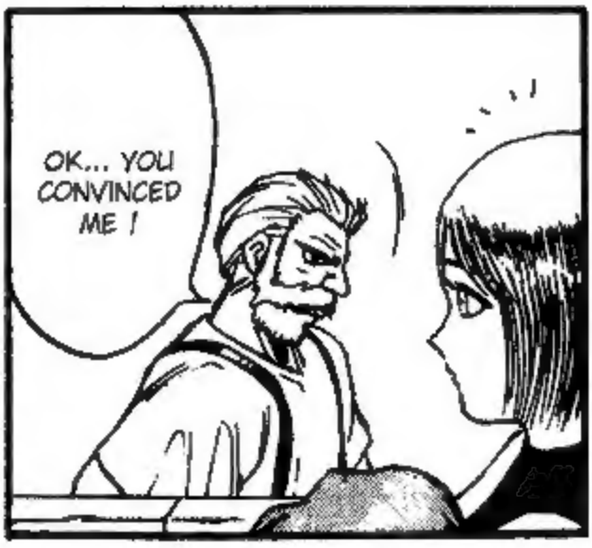
SUCH ANGUISH ON HIS FACE! A LITTLE BRAT...
... SHOULDN'T KNOW THAT.
THE ARM ...
AND ... THE PUP-PETS ...
I'M HERE!
EVERYTHING'S FINE MASTER!!
... TO MASARU AS WELL AS EVERYONE AROUND US.
IF THERE'S A GOD OF MERCY UP THERE IN THE SKY ... I PRAY FOR HIM TO GIVE HIS BLESSING ...
LIKE THE LEAVES THAT DANCE ON THE WIND ... YOUR BED SWINGS SLOWLY ...
MY LITTLE BOY ... MY DEAR BOY ...


...
AND HAPPINESS!
AND I PRAY THAT ONE DAY, WE'LL FIND -PEACE-
...



SAH...

... SHIRO-GANE'S HEART IS LIKE THAT OF A MOTHER ...
TO SAY THAT I WAS CHEERED UP BY A MEMBER OF MY CIR-CUS!


OK... YOU CONVINCED ME !

MISTER NAKAMACHI IS A COURAGEOUS MAN!
I THOUGHT HE WAS DISCOURAGED BUT I WAS WRONG!
SNIFF!
HE DOESN'T SMELL ANYMORE!
SNIFF! SNIFF!
...AND I THINK THAT IT'S EVER SINCE THIS NIGHT THAT THE NAKAMACHI CIRCUS BEGAN TO CHANGE, LITTLE BY LITTLE.
LONG AFTER THIS FAMOUS NIGHT, I LEARNED WHAT MASARU SAW IN HIS DREAM...
YES... LOTS OF EVENTS ANNOUNCED A GREAT CHANGE...
IN RETURN, I ASK YOU TO ACCEPT ME AS A MEMBER OF YOUR CIRCUS FOR AT LITTLE WHILE, AT LEAST.
THE BIG TRUCK BEHIND ME IS FOR YOU.
IT'S ME, TARANDA LISELOTTE ... I CAME BACK.

AS FOR US, WE ARE GOING GROCERY SHOPPING...
HELLO! IT'S ME, MASARU! THE NAKAMACHIS ARE VERY BUSY FITTING OUT THE TRUCK THAT TARANDA OFFERED THEM ...
YES!
HIRO! YOU TAKE CARE OF DECORATING THE INTERIOR!
OKAY!
NORI! YOU'LL INSTALL THE AIR CONDITIONING!
THIS WAS A SUMPTUOUS GIFT FOR US, WHO DID NOT EVEN HAVE A PLACE TO LIVE!
TO N